

Annual General Meeting 2023: Questions and responses

CORPORATE



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This document includes questions asked at the Royal College of Nursing’s Annual General Meeting (AGM) as well as responses provided at the meeting, together with supplementary information where helpful. It also includes responses to questions which were received before, during, and after the AGM and which were not answered at the meeting itself. We have grouped together questions on similar topics. If you feel we have missed anything, please let us know by emailing governance.support@rcn.org.uk

Agenda for Change

“ Does the RCN have a plan to obtain negotiating rights with non-AfC and non-NHS employers to campaign for recognition rights with these employers to ensure all RCN members receive full trade union support? ”

We already have recognition rights with many non-NHS employers and learning agreements with others. All RCN members regardless of their workplace have access to trade union support.



AGM

“ Please could it be published after the event of any questions/points not asked within the meeting? It may be beneficial to consider how there can be a full and frank question and answer for items requiring a vote – this may be at the AGM or through listening events before the event but is important to ensure full information is available to members before the vote takes place as it feels like this may have been curtailed within the time limits.

This questions and answers document will include answers to questions not asked during the meeting due to time constraints. Engagement activity with boards and other membership entities took place in advance of the AGM and information about the resolutions was also on the RCN website.

“ How many members are physically in the hall attending the meeting? And how many are fully funded to be there? And how has proxy been allowed to be counted as part of quorate as it has never been so before?

442 members attended online and 47 attended online. The quorum for AGMs has been in person or by proxy since 2010. We aim to answer all questions that were asked in this document even if it was not possible to answer them all on the day.

“ How many members are attending online?

“ Please can it be confirmed/ recorded of the proportion of members in the room vs online and the proportion of questions asked/answered from each element of the AGM?

“ I’m a member eligible for retired rates but I’ve been paying full, and as you are continuing to remove member democracy as of today’s agenda I will stop paying full fees unless I see members can still have a voice.

Council was very clear that as part of these changes there would be opportunities for members for members, either individually or in groups, to come and speak directly at Council meetings about their concerns and have their say about issues of importance to them. The RCN also hosts a whole raft of Q&A sessions and member engagement events throughout the year on important topics.

“ Having attended many AGMs before it is very depressing to see how few questions are being allowed today. We need to see all questions asked collectively – can that be facilitated please?

The structure of the AGM only allows for a limited period of time for questions, in order to facilitate the discussion of the other agenda items. All questions are recorded and answered here. The current software used for the meeting platform does not allow for participants to see all the questions as they are being asked.

“ I would like to ask under what Rule of the Standing Orders for an AGM is the RCN authorising online voting to take place? My understanding of the current Standing Orders allows in-person voting and via nominated proxy. I do not believe that a change in Standing Orders has been brought before an AGM and my concern is that this will invalidate the voting on the significant resolutions being brought before the members today.

As explained at the AGM there is no rule in the Standing Orders which prevents online voting to take place. The new online meeting platforms, which emerged and were developed during the COVID-19 era due to necessity, have great benefits in enabling more members to participate in events such as the RCN’s AGM. The AGM platform we use offers secure online voting as well as the opportunity for members to ask questions using the online Q&A function or to come online to ask their question via Zoom. Whilst only a relatively small number of members were able to attend the meeting in person ten times that number attended online.

“ Madam President needs to inform members that they can vote against both options on item 3. At the moment, it is stated either 5 or 2.5?

This was clarified during the meeting and was clearly explained on the poll cards and on the voting platform.

“ How many people are online and how many have sent in proxy votes? Can it be demonstrated that this is representative of the membership?

442 people were online. The voting results have been published on the website at rcn.org.uk/About-us/How-the-RCN-is-governed/RCN-general-meetings/RCN-Annual-General-Meeting-2023-post

“ I don't know how people were told to vote yes, I don't feel I have been told to vote one way or the other. It's up to me.

Council recommended that members voted yes to these resolutions as they believed it would be in the best interests of the organisation to do so. Individual members, of course, have a choice in how they vote.

“ How does the Company Act affect a membership organisation like the RCN?

This is quite a complicated question to answer but the RCN is a body incorporated under Royal Charter rather than set up as a company under the specific provisions of the Companies Act. However, many of the provisions in our Royal Charter and Standing Orders align with those in the Companies Act.

“ (President) Sheilabye Sobrany - Your microphone was ON, when you stated that 'I cannot confirm it, but I will say it anyway', referring to the confirming that all voting cards were counted. This is poor. You need to acknowledge what you have said, and genuinely re-confirm that all voting cards in the hall have been collected. Disappointed.

Comments noted, thanks. We can confirm though that the number of poll cards collected correlated with the number of members in the room.

“ Can you tell us if will get a certificate at the end of meeting for use as participatory CPD hours?

No, we do not provide certificates for AGM meetings as they do not have CPD attributed to them like we do for other events such as Congress.

“ Can the Council ensure that the language used for the voting is clearer for some of our members with English as an additional language. Abstain and Against can be easily confused. Perhaps refrain from using abstain as an option or state refuse to vote e.t.c. Or perhaps clarify the terms as added notes.

Comments noted, thank you.

“ Moving forward, could resolutions be worded in more accessible language, as we are not all business people. The language used makes many people not get involved. Could the language used be simplified to layman’s terms?

Branches

“ During COVID it was agreed that branches could roll over 20% of any unspent funds. Can we ensure that this happens going forward?

Council agreed to a one-year pilot in 2021 when branches were allowed to carry over 25% of their underspend into 2022. At the end of 2022 (the pilot year) the pilot was discontinued as all branch/board funds were significantly underspent. Historically branch/board funding has been significantly underspent every year.

“ What’s being done for branch chairs? You mentioned reps and forums, but what about branches?

Support for all active members is being reviewed as part of the organising strategy, governance and culture implementation plan, and activist academy.

“ Many years ago, I was part of a project called Rooting for the Branches, do you remember (Vice-Chair of Council) Paul? I wonder, is it time to review the role, aims and objectives of the branch?

Branch/local structures will be considered as we move forward with the organising strategy and activist academy.

“ Thrutext gave us a great opportunity to engage with our members. Can we keep some elements of it to communicate with our branch members?

Thrutext will continue to be a tool available to the RCN to use at appropriate times. A plan for how, when and where is part of the organising strategy.

“ Can branches and boards be informed and encouraged to invite RCN Fellows to speak at their events, both online and in person?

Yes. We will work with the fellows to agree the best way to do this.

“ With the finances being in such an excellent position, can I ask when branch funds will be reviewed as everything we need to buy to promote the RCN is going up constantly?

Branch and board funds are underspent each year which indicates there is currently no need to review them.

In 2022 overall branches were underspent by around £185,000. In 2023 the Q1 forecast predicted an underspend of around £75,000 in 2023, this will be reviewed as part of the Q2 forecast. The following year branch administration budget is based on branch membership as at September, an uplift on the 2023 budget is expected for 2024.

The branch can discuss their needs with their regional board if there is something they require funding for.



Council

“ There seems to lack of communication from Council to boards and other groups who are expected to carry out the work with the wider membership what is Council going to do to improve this and make boards and groups feel their voice is being heard?

This is an important point. Council does produce a summary of all its meetings which are distributed to the boards, however, we know there is more work to do to improve the relationship between the two. Council is looking forward to board members attending its July meeting and this could be an opportunity to discuss these concerns.

“ Is there a process to deselect Council members rather than calling EGMs or waiting for elections?

As answered during the meeting there is no deselection process as such. Rule 1 in the schedule of Rules attached to the Royal Charter sets out when the seat of a Council member is deemed to be vacant.

“ What about members who do not turn up? Or are suspended? Will that trigger an election rather than an empty seat and a lack of representation.

“ What would the Council/Exec proposal be to ensure transparency about the potential mechanism to ask for items to be added to a Council agenda requests that members may submit?

Now that the resolution has been passed, a new standard operating procedure (SOP) is being developed by the Governance team and will be made available on the RCN website as soon as it is completed.

“ When we will see the new mechanism to be able to raise issues with council instead of holding an EGM. Has the SOP or policy yet been written?



EDI (Equality, diversity and inclusion)

“ What is the progress that has been made on the RCN EDI Strategy? When is this likely to be published and is the RCN looking to canvas or seek to find member views who wish to contribute/engage or who are often experts by their own lived experience?

We have listened extensively regarding the EDI strategy and hope to publish something in the near future.

“ Thank you for reading my enquiry at the AGM about the RCN Long Covid Support Group to help RCN members suffering with Long Covid. Unfortunately, this has been considered as a statement. If I may rephrase. Can the College also setup a group for vaccine-injured members as a consequence of the Covid episode?

Your request will be shared with the Long Covid Support Group.

“ The College’s setting up of the Long Covid Peer Support Group to help RCN members suffering with long-term illness and disability is commendable. However, from the Covid episode there are also nurses who are vaccine-injured and similarly need the support of the College. I have as yet no acknowledgment of my email dated 10 May 2023 to (Director, RCN England) Patricia Marquis which raises this concern. This email was also cc’d to the RCN CEO and General Secretary and my local Regional RCN Director. In line with the RCN Respect Charter, I would be grateful that this is attended to. Thank you.

Your request will be shared with the Long Covid Support Group.

“ What would be the view to proposing statutory legislation to keep nursing posts open and viable for older nurses? This would be expected to cover shift pattern, shift duration, requirement to do nightshifts etc.

We fully encourage individual shift patterns and encourage older nurses to stay in nursing posts. This is for the Employment Relations Department and would be addressed through the Activist Academy.

Elections

“ People are not standing as not prepared to do the work of staff. We over rely on volunteers.

Our elections work over the coming months will seek to understand how we can make our elected and appointed roles of more benefit to the members who put themselves forward.

“ Good morning, I would like to submit a question please. I would like to remain anonymous. Can the RCN explain why the hustings at Congress 2023 were so badly managed and why there was no intervention by governance or otherwise? The timing indicator alert did not work. The Chair stated that the top table would be timing the candidates. Yet despite this there were gross failures, and it is clear from the hustings recordings that this simple requirement was neither competent and in fact not only were the eligibility rules clear, but they resulted in one person not being eligible according to rules being elected, then a second person as result of CES voting counts being also wrongly elected. Then because of the delays and the rules the second person being wrongly elected gets to remain in position. Also, when it is clear from recordings that there were vast differences and treatment differences of some individuals by the chair why did governance not intervene to stop that total in why did governance not intervene to stop that total inadequate process and arguably maltreatment of some candidates, please? In a member-led organisation, why did these continuous failings occur please?

This question is already being handled by the RCN Complaints procedure

“ Some years ago, the RCN restructured Council from two Council members per country or region (in England) to one per constituency. We now have a number of Council members currently suspended – some for a number of months. Whilst appreciating that there are correct processes to be followed when allegations are made against elected members, what mitigation is there in place to ensure that RCN members in those constituencies affected are represented on RCN Council and so that their voices are heard... and acknowledged. This could also be the case should an elected RCN Council Member be incapacitated or on any time of extended leave. Under the previous two Council Member per constituency arrangements, the representation of members was more assured.

Where Council members are unable to attend the board chair, or another board members, is invited to attend to observe the meeting. They are also invited to contribute to discussions.

Governance

“ Can we, as members, be informed of the total cost of the Carr Report?

Spend on Carr in 2022 was £145,000. Anticipated spend on Carr in 2023 is around £130,000.

“ The General Secretary & Chief Executive officer has been interim for two years. She made it clear to the former Council in 2022 when her interim term was extended, she would be retiring at the end of December 2023. Can this be confirmed? Also, with such a pivotal role why are we not advertising now as there is only six months to go. If she is not retiring, then she should still be subject to a full international advertisement, selection and interview process. Can you confirm what is happening?

Pat Cullen has accepted an offer to extend her tenure as General Secretary and Chief Executive Officer to the end of 2024.

“ In light of the fraudulent signatures added to recent EGM petitions, it makes sense to ensure the number voting are more representative of the half a million members. How will the security of this process be assured going forward so that we can be confident signatories are genuine?

The IT team are working on the solution which will similar to the parliamentary petition system on the [Gov.UK](#) website. Petitions will be linked to our membership system and members who add their name will be asked to verify that they have done so.

ICN

“ When we voted on rejoining the ICN we were told the fees would be in the region of £390,00 per annum. What was the cost of subscription to the ICN in the latest financial year?

The 2023 ICN fees were £477,468 (529,000CHF).



Independent sector

“ The RCN tends to regard mostly NHS nurses only. What about the large independent sector nurses especially with regards to working conditions and pay. Secondly, agencies use a lot of nurses in care homes but do not pay well at least not as much as they pay nurses who work in hospitals. There is also the distances travelled to and from work without compensation. What is the RCN doing to engage nurses who work in the independent sector.

We recognise that up to 35% of NMC registrants work outside of the NHS in a variety of settings including care homes and agencies. We have a dedicated workstream established to help us further understand the challenges faced by agency nurses and have carried out listening events which were attended by over 30 members.

We have also conducted an analysis of contacts made to RCN Direct from agency nurses which identified seven common themes:

- Revalidation
- Reflective Accounts
- Training
- Statement Writing
- Indemnity Cover
- Free Legal Advice
- Suspension

We provide resources to support agency nurses which includes dedicated resources as well as inclusive resources that are supportive of members across working settings. Our Agency workers (rcn.org.uk/Get-Help/RCN-advice/agency-workers), and Self-employment (rcn.org.uk/Get-Help/RCN-advice/self-employment) advice guides include links to government websites where members can get definitive information from HMRC regarding employment expenses such as travelling to and from work. This dedicated workstream has to date demonstrated some of the challenges faced by agency nursing members, and further exploratory work is needed to fully understand their needs and how best to further engage them. This work is ongoing.

“ I will like to ask about the College’s plan for nurses in the private sector, including care homes and private hospitals.

We have a dedicated independent health and social care team with resource in each England region as well as Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. ([rcn.org.uk/employment-and-pay](https://www.rcn.org.uk/employment-and-pay)) This is a long term priority for RCN. With regards to members working in care homes and private hospitals we are working across departments to support members ensuring that their needs are met. Regional lead nurses have been engaging with members directly, and from a strategic perspective we are ensuring that the different departments of RCN represent all members including those working in the independent health and social care sector. This work includes understanding the needs of our members who work across 25,000 different employers.



Industrial action

“ The RCN sent out the recent ballot for strike action in the post. With delays and strikes in the postal sector, and the more carbon friendly option of doing an online vote, why can't the RCN adhere to this? Particularly when many other organisations conduct online voting and it's much more efficient. This does not seem in keeping at all with the NHS drive to be carbon neutral in the coming decades.

Legally, we are required to conduct statutory industrial action ballots by post and not online.

“ Given the recent failed ballot to take further strike action, why didn't the RCN have a plan in place to commence a disaggregated ballot whilst member momentum is active and public support high?

If we had disaggregated the ballot rather than aggregating, we would have received a mandate in far fewer organisations than we did in the first ballot and in hindsight, this would have weakened our bargaining power. The results for each employer are available on the website.

“ Given the resources available to the RCN Council, why does analysis of the strike ballot take so long? Why are members not given timeframes, with plans for what is happening next? Also having workstreams is only effective if information is communicated to members.

Every ballot results in a lessons learned exercise and that learning is used to inform next steps. We endeavour to communicate as clearly and as quickly wherever possible.

“ Is there any evidence to suggest that nurse lecturers, are failing to mark student dissertations, as a result of their own industrial actions?

We have no evidence of this bought forward.

“ Is there any evidence of nurse academics refusing to mark student dissertations, as a result of academics own industrial action?

With regards to members working in care homes and private hospitals we are working across departments to support members ensuring that their needs are met. Regional lead nurses have been engaging with members directly, and from a strategic perspective we are ensuring that the different departments of RCN represent all members including those working in the independent health and social care sector. This work includes understanding the needs of our members who work across 25,000 different employers.

“ Feedback on Thrutext was that it is overused and very frustrating and had to be turned off - please reconsider use of that.

Thank you for your feedback. In general there has been very positive feedback on the use of Thrutext. It was and had not been turned off and will continue to be used where appropriate going forward. We continually review the effectiveness and feedback on all our communication and engagement tools.

“ Why don't student nurses have a say in the strike action as members?

Those students who are employed in the NHS while undertaking their studies were able to vote in the strike ballot.

“ We have noted the increase in headcount and the impact on financial planning incremental drift. What is the revenue tail on industrial action activity and how will this impact future financial planning?

The cost of industrial action campaigns are monitored closely with specific budgets set for this purpose, we have a separate industrial action fund within our reserves which currently stands at around £38m. Whilst care is always given to cashflow and capacity within the College, the latter particularly will be impacted by industrial action, the strength of the RCN's financial position allows some flexibility to invest in essential infrastructure and services alongside industrial action. The increase in headcount is attributable in part to industrial action but also planned investment in RCN services and activities including the independent sector and education and learning offer.

“ Why the pay did not rise at all for agency nurses and actually is being decreased? Why agency nurses are not supported at all?

Agency nursing pay is set by the agency therefore any change in rates is down to the agency, hourly rates for nursing staff are frequently higher than the hourly rates paid to staff directly employed by the NHS. The agency has responsibility to review these rates on a regular basis. The RCN is committed to supporting all nursing staff wherever they are employed including those in the independent sector and agency staff. We provide resources to support agency nurses which includes dedicated resources as well as inclusive resources that are supportive of members across working settings. Our Agency Worker (rcn.org.uk/Get-Help/RCN-advice/agency-workers), and Self Employment (rcn.org.uk/Get-Help/RCN-advice/self-employment) advice guides include links to government websites where members can get definitive information from HMRC regarding employment expenses such as travelling to and from work. This dedicated workstream has to date demonstrated some of the challenges faced by agency nursing members, and further exploratory work is needed to fully understand their needs and how best to further engage them. This work is ongoing.

“ Can we please know the cost of the legal process during the strikes, as that question wasn't really answered. Is this cost going to lead to an increase in our subscription fees?

A variety of legal costs have been incurred during the last 12 months of the industrial action including the court proceedings and the funds were available to cover those costs in the RCN industrial action fund. This will not impact subscription rates.

“ Can the Council explain that in the face of the law, the RCN went to court regarding the strike action and as such lost and had to pay the costs - why was such action taken risking members who may have struck illegally and what was the cost of the failed action to pay?

The RCN always intended to abide by the court’s decision, and it did so by repudiating the action on 2 May 2023. The RCN was required to pay the government’s legal costs of £35,000.

“ Can we please know the cost of the legal action taken against the government as this question wasn’t answered in full. Is this cost likely to translate to our subscription fees?

A variety of legal costs were incurred during the last 12 months of the industrial action and the funds were available to cover those costs in the RCN industrial action fund. This will not impact subscription rates.



International nurses

“ The Eastern board has done a lot of work around international nurses and supporting them. What is the College going to do to continue this work and to make sure that the international nurses have a voice within this College?

The International Nursing Academy will be building on all of the excellent work we have and currently see for the Internationally educated nurses across the UK. We are also working closely with members to develop our offers and have work that is being well attended by the members from diaspora and IEN communities.

“ The Eastern board has done lot work around support international nurses what will Council and College be doing to widen this work and support international educated nurse and unique challenges they faces?

We recognise that the experience of international nurses can be challenging, and the RCN is working with its International Committee to see how we work with diaspora group. We will be looking at them in line with the EDI strategy.

“ The RCN in Birmingham did work on international nurses some years ago. We ought to draw on that work. The lead for that work is now an MP for Erdington (Paulette Hamilton).

The International Nursing Academy will be building on all of the excellent work we have and currently see for the internationally educated nurses across the UK.

Networks

“ There is mention of branches and forums, but networks are not mentioned. Where do they figure in the College?”

There are many networks that are seen across the UK and the networks and forums support, delivery, and way forward. They will be working within the Institute’s Academy of Nursing Practice as the majority of their work sits there.



Pay

“ As staff retention, and attracting nurses into an ageing primary care workforce, is pivotal to relieve the pressure on secondary care, this is unlikely to be successful without parity in wages. Many colleagues are reducing their contracted hours, doing agency work instead which obviously costs the NHS more.

This is a statement and an area we will be working on through the workforce academy when addressing the need to move to more sustainable models of recruitment and retention in workforce planning.

“ What work will the College be doing to continue to look at getting a nursing spine?

The RCN continues to discuss the commitment to explore a separate nursing pay spine with the other trade unions, NHS employers and the DHSC.

“ Why do the RCN not seek to influence the NHS Staff Council to enforce the correct payment of NHS staff who work additional or overtime hours (over their contracted hours) in accordance with their contractual agreements - as contained in the NHS Staff Handbook (Agenda for Change) rather than continuing to acquiesce with NHS employers who refuse to honour this part of the national Terms and Conditions of Service and force staff to work at a lesser rate via internal trust bank arrangements?

The RCN has raised the issue of the application of the AfC Terms and Conditions within NHS Staff Council. It is for NHS employers to ensure they pay staff employed on AfC Terms and Conditions the appropriate rate.

We will continue to work with staff council and urge employers for staff to be properly remunerated under the current terms and conditions. We do not support employers forcing staff to work extra hours on bank arrangements.

RCN Institute

“ Is it possible please to have more information about the five academies forming the RCN Institute, as referred to in Report of Council?

The five academies are Nursing Practice, Nursing Workforce, Nursing Leadership, International Nursing, and Activism. Further information will be shared with the membership around their specific functions shortly.

“ Why can't we have an academy that reflects and recognises our trade union function?

Our Activist Academy will reflect and recognise the trade union function of the RCN.



RCNi

“ Why do students not have a chance to use RCNi without that extra payment as well?

RCNi relies on subscription income to cover the cost of producing premium content, such as Nursing Standard Student, double-blind peer reviewed articles and learning modules. This content is costly to produce due extensive quality assurance processes.

A selection of RCNi content, events and digital tools are available free on registration to RCN Learn or RCNi sites, including RCNi news, selected learning modules, CPD webinars, podcasts, CPD articles, careers fairs, conferences and RCNi Portfolio tools.

We are aware that members have raised the issue about paying to access RCNi resources, and we are discussing this at strategic level.

“ As well, why we do not have access for free on RCNi as we already pay for our membership monthly which is rising every year and doesn't provide us much in exchange?

A selection of RCNi content, events and digital tools are available free on registration to RCN Learn or RCNi sites, including RCNi news, selected learning modules, CPD webinars, podcasts, CPD articles, careers fairs, conferences and RCNi Portfolio tools.

Premium content, such as double-blind peer reviewed articles and learning modules, which are written and reviewed by external specialist nurses and edited, designed and published by RCNi teams are costly to produce due extensive quality assurance processes. RCNi covers these costs through subscription fees. 80% of any surplus made by RCNi on an annual basis is returned to the RCN to support delivery of member services.

“ Why can't we subscribe to individual publications, at a pro-rata rate, rather than have to subscribe for access to all of the publications, many of which may not be relevant to the individual?

The subscription fee for RCNi Plus, providing digital access to all of RCNi's content and resources, is broadly based on the price of a subscription to *Nursing Standard*.

Comprehensive research conducted by RCNi with our readers and subscribers shows that they highly value access all of our content in a digital format. Many nursing students and professionals move across wards, settings and specialisms within their roles and careers and feel it is important to be able to access the depth and breadth of content that is relevant to them regardless of which journal it might be published in.

Resolution 1 - Election of Council

“ Please can you clarify that Council members putting themselves forward for election give the same opportunity to others to stand at the same time? The key point is to encourage greater engagement and more members putting themselves forward for election.

Existing Council members were offered the opportunity to have their terms of office extended to 31 December 2024. This was to ensure stability and continuity of Council, as the majority of Council would have been in post for less than a year if elections would have occurred as scheduled.

Council elections will be run in summer 2024 and will be open to all eligible members.

“ As a fully paid-up member I will wish to demand my right to vote for my Council members I do not know the manifesto of current members, hence I am voting against this resolution.

Comprehensive research conducted by RCNi with our readers and subscribers shows that they highly value access all of our content in a digital format. Many nursing students and professionals move across wards, settings and specialisms within their roles and careers and feel it is important to be able to access the depth and breadth of content that is relevant to them regardless of which journal it might be published in.

“ With resolution 1, why would have Council for one year be better than having elections, where we would have Council members for four years?

The KPMG and Carr reviews heralded an important era of transformation for the RCN. The current Council, many of whom were only elected earlier this year following the resignation of Council members in the wake of the EGM in November 2022, felt the one-year extension would help to provide stability during this time.

“ Council have not introduced themselves this meeting. We're asking to vote for them, but some members may not know who they are?

Noted, thank you. Information about current Council members is on the RCN website.

“ There have been previous votes at AGMs to realign council seats to ensure continuity with half of council due for election at the same time. How does this proposal do this so we are not asked to vote for another extension next year?

The plan is to run Council elections next year on the basis of any changes that arise from the review of governance structures recommended in the KPMG report.

“ Members voted for new Council members to be there only until December. Had they been expecting Council members to be there longer they might have voted differently. Can Council not see that taking a vote to stay longer is not respecting member votes?

The KPMG and Carr reviews heralded an important era of transformation for the RCN. The current Council, many of whom were only elected earlier this year following the resignation of Council members in the wake of the EGM in November 2022, felt the one-year extension would help to provide stability during this time.

“ How can a national AGM vote to retain Council members when the Council member belongs to a region? Why should regions tolerate a national vote? How is that democratic as (the Vice-Chair of Council) Paul said it is?

“ In regards to (the Director of Operations) Davinder’s comments regarding those suspended. Suspension should not be seen as a punitive measure and until any outcome is decided by a resolution panel, they should be allowed to have an extension of their tenure as well.

The RCN will not discuss individual cases, but we agree suspension should be seen as a neutral act.

“ The message pertaining to extended terms for suspended members pending outcomes was not answered, can we understand if those individuals will be offered the same term?

The vote pertained to all members of Council whose terms were due to conclude on 31 December 2023.

“ As we have some suspended Council members at the present time will this extension apply to them as well?

“ With the numerous reviews and recommendations and the five-year strategy, would it not be better to hold elections for Council positions sooner rather than later rather than defer? There is never a good time to transition but would at the beginning not be more prudent?

The KPMG and Carr reviews heralded an important era of transformation for the RCN. The current Council, many of whom were only elected earlier this year following the resignation of Council members in the wake of the EGM in November 2022, felt the one-year extension would help to provide stability during this time.

“ We have no doubt the current Council are committed - this is not about their commitment, it is about why extend and this could be done with an incoming Council - why is it so imperative for this group to stay on when they can re-stand?

“ I wish to read out the following statement: Around November 2022, 94% of the voting members effectively voted that they had no confidence in the current chair and members of the leadership team urging them to stand down and not return. Cynically the chair (CP) said we can't be made to and we have done nothing wrong. Now the leadership, again cynically and with total disregard for the paying members wishes, want the members to vote to keep them in place for longer, in other words business as usual. I am not going to take this any longer and effective immediately I am suspending my subscription and with more hope than expectation I urge other members to do the same until either the leadership team go or the RCN confirm they accept my resignation.

Thank you for your comments.

“ If an election for Council members occurred, what assurances can you give members, that the voting would be conducted more effectively than the ballot for strike action?

All elections and ballots are carried out in line with relevant legislation, rules and standards expected of the organisation. It is difficult to answer this question without knowing more about your concerns.

“ As we are being asked to vote to extend Council term of office, should this not also apply to boards and branches?

This would be a matter for the boards and branches.

“ Surely the problem members have with Resolution 1 is that there are two different voting processes here? There is the issue of how those members were voted in (a short while ago) which was according to the rules of the College and now there is another democratic process about deciding whether their terms of office should be extended. I think these two different (democratic) processes haven’t been properly explained by the platform party.

Comments noted.

“ Regarding Resolution 1, can Council confirm that as an alternative to this resolution, an election can be called where members can vote on candidates or members may be elected unopposed?

An election cannot be called when there are current incumbents. If the resolution had not been passed an election would have taken place later in the year for terms of office to start in January 2024.

“ If the resolution is not passed, then an election would be called?

“ Regarding Resolution 1, those Council members affected by this - have they all agreed to continue in office if this motion is passed?

The Council members who are currently able to take part in Council meetings agreed that they would.

Resolution 3 - EGM

“ The representative element of congress offers one voting place for one in 1,000 members of the forums and branches to vote to carry resolutions. Why is that threshold substantially less than what is proposed to allow for members to call an EGM/add an item onto an AGM agenda?

The two things are not comparable.

“ Why has the decision been to raise the thresholds for the only mechanism currently within the standing orders that an ordinary (non-Council) member to hold their elected council to account rather than consider ensuring that other/ alternative mechanisms are not also set down within the standing orders (so can only be changed by the members)?

There are many ways in which members can hold their elected Council members to account.

“ When will we discuss the fact members details were entered fraudulently into a petition calling for an EGM, undermining members efforts to call a vote of no confidence?

We presume this was a request to discuss this at the AGM. Unfortunately, there was no time to answer all the questions that came in. In relation to the fraudulent EGM petition investigations are ongoing.

“ Surely, we need to get engagement up? If quoracy is less than the amount of members required to even call a meeting? Is an EGM itself destabilising or is the lack of confidence in those called to step down the issue?

The point about engagement is important and, of course, increasing engagement of members in their trade union is always a goal. Both Bruce Carr KC and KPMG in their respective reports give detailed explanations and information about the destabilising impact of EGMs.

“ Resolution three calls for either 5% or 2.5%, 25,000 or 12,500 members to call an EGM. The RCN with its database and ability to contact all members rarely ever reaches this figure for an AGM. In fact, the highly rated campaign to rejoin the ICN only managed 1.5% support. Is there not a danger that if either is passed it will be virtually impossible to ever call an EGM and hold the organisation to account?

Members have demonstrated that, if an issue is of importance to them, then they will vote in significant numbers.

“ On current membership, can you give a round figure of what 5% or 2.5% of membership means in numbers?

25,000 = 5%; 12,500 = 2.5%.

“ Membership has grown exponentially since the threshold was set at 1,000 members. It is currently at 0.2% as a result of growth. If we cannot engage 2.5% or 5% of members, then it is not representative or ethical. How does Council intend to improve representative engagement?”

As you will no doubt be aware, members voted as part of the AGM to change the threshold for requisitioning an Extraordinary meeting. The vote was open to all members and a clear majority of voters supported increasing the threshold to be representative of the current, large size of the modern Royal College of Nursing.

The previous threshold of 1,000 signatures originates in an era when the College was far smaller and before modern means of communication to achieve such a number of signatures did represent a strength of feeling of members. Now that the membership is in excess of half a million and still growing, we looked to legislation, and other unions and professional bodies for best practice. Last year’s two reviews of the RCN’s governance and culture, by Bruce Carr KC and KPMG respectively, agreed that the threshold must be increased in line with how other organisations provide for extraordinary meetings to be called.

However, RCN Council and its current membership are very keen to build upon the record levels of member engagement we have experienced in the last 12 months. As part of the modernisation of our approach to EGMs, there will be provision for members to secure space on Council and other meeting agendas.

In the RCN’s five-year strategy released earlier this year, itself a recommendation of the two reports, the College commits itself to being transparent, open, inclusive and representative of the entire membership. We believe that the changes to our governance, voted for by members and recommended by external reviews, will bring stability for the College and allow it to focus on the delivery of strategic priorities in our professional and trade union areas of work.

Social enterprise nurses

“ What are the RCN doing for social enterprise nurses in terms of pay rise? The AfC pay rise will destabilise our local out of hours, urgent care centres, primary care services that are all run by social enterprises like ours. They may leave to join the hospital. We don't get a vote unless on full AfC T's and C's, yet we have 350 nurses in our organisation all without a vote on pay.

The RCN has lobbied government and commissioners to push for funding to provide to these sectors for the lump sum and 5% pay rise. Funding has been provided to local authorities and in most cases for the 2023/4 rise of 5%. RCN is working with members now to secure the pay rise from their employers.

Further details at:
rcn.org.uk/Get-Involved/Campaign-with-us/Fair-Pay-for-Nursing/Latest-updates/Industrial-action-FAQs

Student nurses

“ What are the next steps and how are you supporting international student nurses with regards to the Jan 2024 student visa?

There have been changes highlighted to the access for students coming to the UK. to bring their families with them and this is only available for post reg courses. These changes are coming in 2024. We are continuing to lobby the government around visa discrepancies and will work with the international committee and others to raise these issues. We have seen over 3,400 students this year applying through UCAS from abroad which is an increase in access to pre-registration courses and will work with the Council of Deans to address this as we move forward.

“ How is the RCN supporting student nurses in hardship if the hardship funds is for qualified and support staff only?

Hardship funding is available through universities and the RCN supports students with access to this if this is proving difficult. This is supported with the help of the professional lead and ERD as identified through requests that come to RCND. We also continue to lobby the government regarding the funding of pre-registration education, highlighting the difficulties of our members.

“ How does the RCN plan on implementing a nationwide structure for disabled student nurses? A large majority face discrimination within the educational and NHS systems. They are subject to blame culture and harassment and reasonable adjustments are seen as unacceptable and unreasonable. How does the RCN plan on insurance for disabled students so they can succeed in a more sustainable supportive environment? ”

Addressing disability and neurodiversity through ERD and professional resources is a priority for the College across the whole workforce. Support is offered to individual cases and this work will form the objectives of the Institute and academies moving forward.



Trade union

“ Regarding the response that nurses do not know their shift patterns six weeks in advance. This also applies to other roles, such as HCA and student nurses. Student nurses also encountered cancelled shifts due to the strike. They are now owing hours back.

We acknowledge your statement regarding rostering issues.

“ I understand about shift patterns etc, but back to basics, if you want to go into nursing, you are there for the PATIENTS , you know what you're getting into, if it's not for you then?? How can we review the working hour of nurses? 13/23 hour shifts were an experiment that are interfering with work-life balance. As work-life balance is impossible to achieve with 13-hour shifts is the RCN proposing a return to 8.5 hour shifts?

The RCN is supportive of flexible working in all forms to ensure members have a better work/life balance.

“ I also work alongside nurses who have signed unreasonable contracts. Can we prioritise recruiting these workers to become members and reps to give them a voice?

Yes, we are keen to recruit these members and increasing our rep numbers in these types of organisations is a priority.

“ As majority of GPs do not pay their practices nurses or HCAs according to Agenda for Change, leaving us at a significant financial detriment to when compared to our colleagues in secondary care in similar banding. What pressure is being applied by the RCN for this to be addressed?

Following the Government’s announcement of a 6% uplift in the GP contracts to fund a pay increase for all staff employed in general practice we are working to ensure all eligible member secure the pay rise once the funds are made available to practices.

Here are a further six key ways the RCN is supporting members:

- The RCN is currently involved in the expert advisory group for the 2024/2025 GP contract with key partners such as the British Medical Association (BMA) Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC), the NHS Confederation, Royal College of General Practitioners (RCGP) and NHS England.
- The RCN is responding to NHS England’s Delivery plan for recovering access to primary care, published in May 2023.
- In partnership with the General Practice Nursing (GPN) Forum we’re reviewing the RCN Workforce Standards to ensure they’re relevant to nursing staff working in general practice.
- The RCN is developing good employment standards alongside the RCN Workforce Standards.
- The GPN Forum is leading a project looking at nursing career pathways and template job descriptions for nurses working in general practice which will help to ensure equitable pay, terms and conditions.
- In partnership with NHS England (NHSE) and the National Association of Primary Care (NAPC), the RCN runs monthly webinars on the first Friday of every month, from 1-2pm. These are an opportunity for nurses in general practice to see examples of good practice, get an update from the RCN, NHSE and the RCN GPN Forum, hear from members and answer their questions.

Please see rcn.org.uk/news-and-events/news/uk-general-practice-nursing-staff-make-sure-you-get-your-pay-rise-210723

The RCN represents nurses and nursing, promotes
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